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THE POWER OF THE TRUTHFUL: SATYA IN THE NONVIOLENCE OF GANDHI AND HAVEL

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Conflicting global narratives on good or right living, based on conflicting truth-claims, can often lead to violence. We can find examples in religious, ethnic, or ideological conflicts that confirm this. One of the central elements in the practice of nonviolence is that of satya, a Sanskrit term best translated as "truth." In this paper I argue that satya points to a very specific conception of truth and that by examining the lives and work of both Mohandas Gandhi and Václav Havel, I will explore satya as a practice of complexity handling.

In a globalizing world in which people have no choice but to position themselves in the multiplicity of narratives, developing skills of handling complexity are crucial. This paper argues that the theory and practice of nonviolence holds clues for how to do this. I use the term nonviolence here not only to point to the absence of violence in solving problems, but as a coherent set of ideas and practices that provide a framework for understanding (social) reality.

The logic of a story resembles the logic of games, a logic of tension between what is known and not known, between rules and chance, between the inevitable and the unforeseeable. We never really know what will emerge from the confrontation, what elements may yet enter into it, and how it will end; it is never clear what potential qualities it will arouse in a protagonist and what action he will be led to perform by the action of his antagonist. For this reason alone, mystery is a dimension of every story. What speaks to us through a story is not a particular agent of truth; instead, the story manifests the human world to us as an exhilarating arena where many such agents come into contact with each other. —Václav Havel[1]

INTRODUCTION

Conflicting global narratives on good or right living, based on conflicting truth-claims, can and often do lead to violence. We need not look far to find examples in contemporary religious, ethnic, or ideological conflicts that

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confirm this. Yet, one of the central elements in the practice of nonviolence is that of *satya*, a Sanskrit term best translated as "truth." In this article I will address this paradox by arguing that satya points to a very specific conception of truth, which I will explore by examining satya in the lives and work of both Mohandas Gandhi and Václav Havel. I use the term nonviolence here not only to point to the absence of violence in solving problems, but as a coherent set of ideas and practices that provide a framework for understanding (social) reality.

The roots of contemporary nonviolence lie, to an important extent, in the work of Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi construed nonviolence, an ancient religious and philosophical concept, into a new systematic and pro-active way that made it applicable in contemporary society. He used it as a guiding principle in his own life and as a method for waging struggle against injustice and oppression. Since Gandhi, nonviolence has been a method of addressing conflicts and injustices for both large social movements, as well as for private people in interpersonal conflicts. An example of this latter case is the method of Nonviolent Communication, devised by Marshall Rosenberg.[2] Prominent examples of nonviolent social movements are the civil rights movement in the USA, the overthrow of president Marcos in the Philippines of the 1980s and the movement of Charter 77 in then-Czechoslovakia, of which Václav Havel was a distinguished member. Each translates Gandhi's concepts to their own circumstances, expanding and amending different aspects. This has led to the emergence of a nonviolence paradigm[3] in which five basic elements appear: *satya* or "truth," *ahimsa* or "the intention not to harm," *tapasya* or "self-suffering," *sarvodaya* or "the welfare of all," and *swadeshi/swaraj* or "authenticity and relational autonomy." Each of these elements is a complex and layered notion and each is equally important in a process of nonviolence. I will focus in this paper specifically on the element satya, or truth. I denote these concepts here with the Sanskrit terms originating in the work of Gandhi, because I

Five basic elements appear in the nonviolence paradigm: *satya, ahimsa, tapasya, sarvodaya,* and *swadeshi/swaraj.* Each of these elements is a complex and layered notion and each is equally important in a process of nonviolence.

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believe these terms are able to adequately capture this complexity. I pose that satya as a central element is present in each nonviolent process. This does, however, not necessarily mean that the term satya itself is used in all circumstances. Even so, it is my claim that although in different contexts different terms are used, they point to what in a general sense can be called satya. To clarify this concept and its role in nonviolence I will start by explaining the origin of the term in the work of Gandhi and go on to compare this with the work of Václav Havel and his intellectual mentor Jan Patočka who both focus overtly on the importance of "living in truth."

GANDHI'S TRUTH

Satya derives from the Sanskrit root *sat* meaning "to be." It refers both to truth in the sense of truthfulness or honesty, and to truth as "that which exists," or reality. Gandhi's search for truth is directed towards understanding reality at the deepest level as well as living in accordance with that understanding. This "search for truth" formed the essence of his work. He gave his socio-political struggles the name *satyagraha*, meaning truth-force,[4] and his life was to become a string of "experiments with truth."[5] To Gandhi, truth is both universal as well as particular. He is convinced that there was an Ultimate Truth, but is equally convinced that people can only understand it in a relative sense. What is more, one can only find it in experience.[6]

Gandhi gave his socio-political struggles the name *satyagraha,* meaning truth-force.

Although Gandhi's thought is firmly based in the specific Hindu tradition of his native Gujarat, it is also shaped by elements of other religious traditions like Jainism and Christianity, as well as secular and political works of, among others, Ruskin and Thoreau.[7] Gandhi refutes the idea that an understanding of truth and reality can come from knowing dogmas or religious or theoretical principles. Fundamental to his ideas on truth is the Jain concept of *anekantavada* or "…the many sidedness of all phenomena."[8] In explaining this position, Gandhi points to the parable of the blind men and the elephant.[9] Gandhi's satya is therefore not (solely) a notion that departs from postulates about truth. Gandhi departs from the premise that

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each truth "carries the conviction it does for those who experience it, and not for others."[10] We can experience something to be true, yet others can come to an opposite conclusion based on their own experiences. These truths then do not cancel each other out, both experiences being real, but they each represent different facets of reality. Gandhi states:

> It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view. (…) The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of one another, and right and wrong from the point of view of the man who knew the elephant.[11]

Thus, to Gandhi the realization that our truths only represent facets of the ultimate truth leads him to an "epistemological respect for the view of others."[12]

When we take this at face-value, it would follow that satya is an extremely relative concept, almost a matter of taste. Yet in all of Gandhi's life and work it shows that he cares deeply and that his convictions are no mere matter of taste. As said, to Gandhi satya has both a relative and a universal meaning. Understanding Ultimate Reality as plural, Gandhi sees each particular experience of truth as representing Universal Truth. Therefore each particular understanding of truth does have universal value, since it represents something of the human experience.[13] Gandhi called people to examine each situation, to get to understand what was at stake for all involved, so as to arrive at a fuller understanding of truth. Although people should strive to understand the truth of every situation, one can never claim to be all-knowing. Therefore, in times of disagreement, it could be that the other party sees something more of the truth than we do, even though we are convinced that we are right. This does not mean that we should instantly give up our own ideas about the truth; it means that we allow for the possibility for both truths to exist.

Because Gandhi denies the possibility for any one person or group to hold absolute truth, he also denies the ability for any one person or group to pass ultimate judgement, or to create dogmatic rules that everyone should follow.[14] Therefore, to Gandhi, satya is intertwined with another

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of the fundamental principles in nonviolence: *ahimsa*, or "the absence of the intention to do harm."[15] Harm, here does not only point to the effects of physical, emotional or verbal violence, but is also the consequence of ill will, of negative attitudes, and criticisms against others. As I will explain below, Gandhi does not mean that one should uncritically agree with all other views. What he does mean has to do with the way in which we act when confronted with a conflicting truth claim.

When we create universal principles from our own experiences it follows that others, who do not follow the same principle, are wrong and deserve our criticism and contempt. It is this attitude that to Gandhi lies at the bases of violence. When confronted with an opposing truth claim, we should not try to enforce our own view, or coerce others into taking our stand. One cannot find truth without practising *ahimsa*. In criticizing others we place ourselves and our own view above others. Instead, according to Gandhi, truth can only be found through the interaction of competing views of reality and the integration of those competing visions into a more complex notion of truth.[16] Similarly, Gandhi emphasizes the connection between means and ends, which he sees as two sides of the same coin. If human beings cannot have absolute knowledge, neither can they have a full conception of the ends of their actions. But the means they use to get there are "certain and concrete."[17] Our means should therefore reflect our ends and that leaves *ahimsa*, acting with the intention not to harm, as the only defendable means trough which truth can be realized.[18]

According to Gandhi, truth can only be found through the interaction of competing views of reality and the integration of those competing visions into a more complex notion of truth.

To Gandhi, satya is also about putting his own truth at the service of others, so that everyone has the opportunity to develop a deeper level of satya. Each particular understanding of truth, although not an absolute, does have universal value since it represents a part of reality.[19] It is here that he makes the connection with the other understanding of satya, that of honesty or truthfulness. Our experience of truth cannot lead to a rule for everyone to follow, but it does lead to a rule for oneself to follow: "the very

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idea of principles (or doctrines) is replaced by the idea of exemplarity."[20] Satya therefore implies that "we are dedicated to the truth we perceive, to the truth we understand."[21] If we live from our own truth as we understand it, setting an example, we can share our truth with others and other truths become available to us. Since these truths are all representations of Ultimate Truth, the confrontation with other views leads to a new experience, making a deeper understanding of satya possible.

When confronted with a view that is in direct opposition to our own, or which is perceived as wrong, the only option is that of persuasion, not coercion. By completely and honestly acting upon the truth we perceive, thus presenting a different reality, we might persuade the other to change their view, or we might change our own. The other option is to search for a "mutually satisfactory and agreed-upon solution."[22] But this can only happen if we take the experience and the truth of others as serious as those of ourselves. Conflicts are thus an opportunity to come to a higher, more complex understanding of truth, provided they are dealt with nonviolently. In other words, to Gandhi, real truth emerges in the "in-between," in the spaces between different experiences that are related.

TRUTH TELLING IN WESTERN DISCOURSE

A lot has happened in the theory and practice of nonviolence since Gandhi. Although the direct connection with the eastern traditions and their understanding of truth is not necessarily present in each nonviolent process, the search for truth and living up to it, certainly is. Sometimes it is phrased as "speaking truth to power." In the practice of Nonviolent Communication it takes the shape of looking for the thoughts, feelings and needs we have and communicating them honestly.

To investigate how this concept of truth in nonviolence emerges in other contexts than that of Gandhi, I will explore the life and work of playwright, activist, and former Czech president Václav Havel, who speaks and writes about "living in truth" in the context of a totalitarian regime. Although Havel does not mention Gandhi in his writings, their ideas show a remarkable resemblance. Like Gandhi, Havel's aim is to live in truth, and like Gandhi the basis for this truth lies for Havel in experience, pluriformity, responsibility, and selfless action.

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Havel finds a philosophical foundation for his ideas in the work of Jan Patočka.[23] Patočka, phenomenological philosopher, student of both Heidegger and Husserl, was one of Havel's intellectual mentors and together with Jiří Hájek, Havel and Patočka became the spokespersons of the Czechoslovak dissident movement around Charter 77.

This movement gained its name from the publicly disseminated document, the Charter, in which a group of dissidents demanded that the Czechoslovak government implemented the human rights it claimed to grant its citizens by signing the Helsinki Accords.[24] It eventually became one thing the Czechoslovak dissident movement rallied around. The charter was openly signed, eventually by hundreds of dissidents. The regime's response to the publication of what it called an anti-state document was harsh. Most of the early signatories were arrested and spent years in prison; Jan Patočka died as a result of the police interrogation.[25]

Charter 77 became one thing the Czechoslovak dissident movement rallied around. The charter was openly signed, eventually by hundreds of dissidents. The regime's response was harsh.

Havel is very explicit about his philosophical debt to Patočka,[26] stating that reading Patočka's work at an early age had been "instrumental in shaping his life,"[27] and that Patočka's Socratic-style lectures and seminars had been an important inspiration to the dissident movement in communist Prague.[28] One of the areas in which Havel is inspired by Patočka is his understanding of the resistance movement as a work of philosophy-in-action,[29] resting on a commitment to living in truth.

To Patočka, philosophy is the labor of searching for morality and meaning in experience.[30] Practicing philosophy leads one to uncover the truth about reality, specifically the reality of human existence.[31] This in turn creates an imperative to take up the responsibility to act in accordance with that truth.[32] Part of the practice of philosophy is what Patočka denotes with the Platonic term "care of the soul," the activity of carefully examining reality, through the practice of Socratic questioning[33] to gain clarity about "what the human being really is."[34] Once one engages with this practice of philosophy it is no longer possible to simply accept any solid certainties about reality:

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> Nothing of the earlier life of acceptance remains in peace; all the pillars of the community, traditions, and myths, are equally shaken, as are all the answers that once preceded questions, the modest yet secure and soothing meaning, though not lost, is transformed.[35]

To Patočka, care of the soul does not only mean questioning the cosmological or natural reality of human existence, but social reality as well.

> It means questioning the forms and patterns that are being transferred by society and which we have been taking for granted. It means reconsidering various alleged truths about…the whole moving human being in the world. It means a turn to authenticity—living from what I am and trying to find out for myself, without neglecting or hiding some unpleasant and annoying aspects.[36]

Living in truth thus also means accepting the painful and problematic aspects of life, including one's finitude. In what Patočka has called a naïve life it is possible to hide behind false certainties and so to overlook the problematic aspects. In a conscious life this overlooking is not possible. One must face up to the truth of existence. But, says Patočka, by becoming aware, transformation happens. Human reality

> is something that changes when we become conscious of it. A naive and a conscious situation are two different situations. Our reality is always situational, so that if it is reflected on, it is already different by the fact of our having reflected on it.[37]

Perhaps not surprisingly, Patočka's ideas show some resemblance with the work of Foucault who has on a number of occasions[38] lectured on the subject of *parrhesia*, or truth-telling as a moral and political virtue.[39] Both Foucault and Patočka look to Greek, and specifically Platonic, philosophy to ground their ideas on truth. At first sight, Foucault's explanation of *parrhesia* seems to completely overlap with Patočka's ideas when he says:

> *Parrhesia* is a verbal activity in which a speaker expresses his personal relationship to truth, and risks his life because he recognizes truth-telling as a duty to improve or help other people (as well as himself).… the speaker uses his freedom and chooses frankness instead of persuasion, truth instead of falsehood or silence, the risk of death instead of life and

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security, criticism instead of flattery, and moral duty instead of self-interest and moral apathy.[40]

However, looking more closely at Foucault's explanation, some important differences become apparent that are significant, especially in the context of nonviolence. Most important is that *parrhesia* in Foucault's analysis is antagonistic. *Parrhesia* has to be a form of criticism towards he interlocutor, not towards the self, which is why Foucault connects it to danger. It is only *parrhesia* if the *parrhesiast* (the person who applies *parrhesia*) in some way runs the risk of being in danger, of losing something he values because of his criticism (a friendship, a job, even his life). And in this sense, Foucault states that parrheisia is always directed from below, from someone who deems himself able to speak the truth, to above, towards someone who holds some form of power to do damage to the *parrhesiast*.[41]

For Patočka, living in truth is done foremost for its own sake, because it makes life meaningful and truly human.

In Patočka's analysis, however, the other does not take such a central place. For Patočka, living in truth is done foremost for its own sake, because it makes life meaningful and truly human. Insights into the essence of human life compel one to take up the responsibility to live accordingly. Instead of criticism, living in truth is rather a form of selfless service. That such a life in truth often amounts to a form of criticism because it leads one to criticize existing social structures, or because it leads one to step outside mainstream notions, and that such a life is often indeed uncomfortable and dangerous, is essentially a coincidence.

Furthermore, for Patočka, direct criticism of others is problematic because the practice of care of the soul consists of an ongoing search for the essence of human reality, an ever questioning attitude.[42] In this sense, Patočka's living in truth is closely related to Gandhi's views on satya, where Foucault's *parrhesia* is not so much.[43] Especially the necessity for criticism towards the other in *parrhesia*, which, as we have seen in Gandhi's work, goes against the grain of *ahimsa* and *anekantavada,* severs this connection. Gandhi replaces criticism with exemplarity, whereby one's insights to truth compel one to act in accordance with them, but do not compel

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others. Examples of others might lead to new insights, but these can't be enforced. Therefore, not all kinds of truth-practices can, in the context of nonviolence, be denoted with the term satya. To gain a better understanding of this idea of exemplarity in a very concrete and practical sense, we can look at the work of Václav Havel.

HAVEL'S STORY-LOGIC

One of the important ways in which Havel follows Patočka is in the belief that introspection and giving an account of that introspection through action is a way of "both doing and transcending experience."[44] Contrary to Patočka, though, Havel is not an academic philosopher who strives to create a coherent and consistent theory;[45] he speaks primarily to ordinary people.[46] Havel is, like Gandhi, an activist who is foremost concerned with social change and with the application of ideas and their practical effectiveness. But his work is grounded in the practice of philosophy, of introspection, as Patočka describes it and to a certain extent he turns Patočka's abstract philosophy into a concrete way of resisting.[47]

Havel starts his long career by writing plays, his philosophical and political essays follow later. Both his essays and his plays contain detailed analyses of the workings of the totalitarian system and the way it should or could be resisted. Havel's life and work take shape in the context of the communist (post-)totalitarian regime of Czechoslovakia, after the second world war. It is this regime that creates, according to Havel, a situation that forces all its citizens to live a lie.

This lie consists of the monolithic truth the regime enforces, denying people to live in accordance with their own truths. Following Patočka, and resonating Gandhi, Havel sees this as a form of violence and he proposes "living in truth" as a way out. The regime also uses overt violence to enforce compliance and to dispose of any possible threat. But what is much worse, Havel says, is the constant dehumanization it inflicts on every individual and on society by imposing a "monologically premised worldview on a plurally constituted reality."[48]

Havel illustrates this in his essay *The Power of the Powerless.*[49] There he depicts a greengrocer who puts the slogan "Workers of the World Unite!" in his shop window, between the carrots and onions. This poster has been

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given to him by the government. He puts the slogan in the window not because he believes in it or because he thinks it has any bearings on his vegetables. He hangs the slogan so he is able to survive within the system, thus perpetuating it. He is probably right. If he does not hang the slogan, he would probably lose his job. But by complying he signals to all other citizens that this is the proper way to behave, thus perpetuating the system. People, states Havel,

> need not accept the lie. It is enough for them to have accepted their life with it and in it. For by this very fact, individuals confirm the system, fulfil the system, make the system, *are* the system.[50]

The regime, with its monolithic truth, needs people to focus on their own survival *within* the system. All pervasive as it is, the system relies on compliance. It cannot tolerate any views outside the ideology; it has no room for different lived experiences. It exists for nothing else than its own perpetuation. Were the greengrocer one day to stop behaving in the way that is expected of him, and start acting in accordance with his own worldviews, experiences, truths, he would not have simply committed an individual offence, but something that has a much wider impact "by breaking the rules of the game, he has disrupted the game as such."[51]

Stories, the way Havel thinks of them, are not depictions of unified truths but present an arena where different truths and logics meet and interact.

Havel, who writes not as a scholar but is most of all an author and playwright, sees this in the frame of what he calls "the logic of stories."[52] Havel uses the term stories in a very specific way. To him, the monolithic truth of the regime is not a story, in fact it is the opposite. Stories, in the way Havel thinks of them, are not depictions of unified truths but present an arena where different truths and logics meet and interact. He states:

> Every story begins with an event. This event—understood as the incursion of one logic into the world of another logic—initiates what every story grows out of and draws nourishment from: situations, relationships, conflict. The story has a logic of its own as well, but it is the logic of a dialogue,

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> an encounter, the interaction of different truths, attitudes, ideas,… that is, of many autonomous, separate forces…. Obviously, the totalitarian system is in essence (and in principle) directed against the story.[53]

The regime, says Havel, aims for the destruction of the story. And the destruction of the story is the destruction of the human instrument of knowledge and self-reflection. Here, Patočka's insights ring through. If the greengrocer were to question the forms and patterns that are transferred by the regime, and reconsider its alleged truths, he would transform his life from a naïve to a conscious one. But Havel also shows why this ideology and the option of naivety is alluring:

> To wandering humankind it offers an immediately available home: all one has to do is accept it, and suddenly everything becomes clear once more, life takes on new meaning, and all mysteries, unanswered questions, anxiety, and loneliness vanish.[54]

By presenting their own truths next to that of the totalitarian regime, people help to create a fuller picture of satya.

The ideology presented by the regime offers ready-made certainties to hold on to and provides an opportunity to ignore all life's problematic questions. And so, living in truth is not for the faint of heart.

Like Gandhi, Havel points to accepting the consequences of one's actions, as part of living in truth and taking responsibility. Havel's work emphasizes the ability of seemingly impotent people to break through this all-pervasive system and transform society by taking responsibility for their individuality, through speaking about and acting upon their personal truths based in lived experience.[55] As soon as people set out to discover their own truth and live in accordance with it, they provide others with an option to discover their own humanity in turn. To phrase it in terms of nonviolence: by presenting their own truths next to that of the totalitarian regime, they help to create a fuller picture of satya.

The main aim of Havel's writings is not to overthrow the regime (although his work has ultimately contributed a great deal to that result). The aim is to create immediate changes in the daily lives of ordinary people

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so that they might recover their humanity.[56] To Havel this humanity is found in the ability of people to explore their own stories and those of others, to live in a world of multiplicity and make choices based on their own understanding of truth and the perspectives of others, of the interactions of different logics that arise in confrontations.

CONSTRUCTIVITY

In this last section I want to focus on the wider implications of everything that has been discussed above and there are two things that I would like to highlight. One is the connection between the obstructive and the constructive side of nonviolence and the second other, related thing is the interrelation between the personal and the political sides of nonviolence.

Both Gandhi and Havel stress that the personal and the political, the individual and the public quest to live in truth as intertwined. The personal search for one's identity and truth are done in private, although such a process is always influenced by the social context. Acting upon one's truth, especially in the form of exemplarity as I have described before, is a public act and has social consequences. This is what Havel aims to do through his writings. Framed in narrative terminology Havel's work presents a counter-narrative[57] against the monolithic narrative of the regime, providing others with a more complex concept of reality and thus the ability to live more truthful, both socially and private. Havel's example of the greengrocer makes this clear. The greengrocer does not just become a better, more sincere person himself by refusing to hang a slogan in his shop that he does not believe in, he also contributes to a fundamental change in the system. So, the role of satya in nonviolence is not just a moral imperative to live in truth, but a call to action, to participate in the creation of social realities that are more nonviolent.

It is important to note here that every nonviolent effort therefore includes both an obstructive and a constructive program. Living in truth, as Havel describes it, can be an act of obstruction, disrupting the workings of a monolithic system but it can also be an act of construction, part of the creation of new structures. This requires, of course, an individual commitment. However, creating a more nonviolent society requires a more structural approach as well, "transforming the thinking 'I' into an acting 'we'."[58]

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Constructive action comprises autonomous and pro-active ways to create new institutions, resting on the principles of nonviolence, and points to "building the new society in the shell of the old"[59] and the "construction of complete independence by truthful and nonviolent means."[60] Although the obstructive side of nonviolence is most discussed and perhaps most obvious, for Gandhi the obstructive program was only an aid to the constructive side.[61] However, constructing nonviolent social institutions is a long and tedious process; it is not something that will yield immediate, visible results and is often neglected. Robert Burrowes observes:

> If new types of structures are not being created to replace the old, then even a successful nonviolent defence will merely deliver control of the old and inadequate state structure to a new elite.[62]

That this is the most difficult part we can see reflected in the case of former Czechoslovakia. *Samizdat* writings, the creation of "floating universities" and other such "embryonic structures independent of the state"[63] did lay a foundation for the creation of a democratic Czechoslovakia. Havel's writings had a big influence on the re-emerging of civil society and public life.[64] However, these embryonic structures were not developed enough and Havel as president of the new, democratic Czechoslovakia was ultimately unable to prevent the rise of new sentiments and structures that curbed living in truth. The rise of strong nationalism, even tied-up with anti-semitism[65] and the rushing in of neo-liberal economics (ultimately leading to the split of Czech Republic and Slovakia) are but two examples of how the actual societal changes only paid lip service to Havel's (and Patočka's) ideas. Joanne Sheehan describes this in more general terms when she says that:

> In cases where political revolutions have taken place but the population is not organized to exercise self-determination, the creation of a new society has been extremely difficult. In some cases, the usurpation of power by a new dictatorship has been the result; in others, there has been political regime change without fundamental social or economic transformation.[66]

Yet, this does not in any way devalue the attempts of Havel or the general conclusion that satya, and living in truth is a fundamental aspect of nonviolence. The importance of the obstructive side has been discussed above. The constructive side needs to gain far more importance, even center

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stage as Gandhi also realized in the practice of nonviolence. But the two sides are fundamentally connected and the same principles apply for both. Robert Pirro summarizes:

> What ought to result…is a community of people better able to mediate personal interest and public good in both their thinking and their actions. The experience on which this political outcome of well-adjusted citizenship hinges is a state of contemplative contact with existence. And if not everyone chooses or is able to achieve this state, then those who have must be counted on to convey its politically relevant lessons in a… convincing manner.[67]

SATYA IN NONVIOLENCE

Conflicting global narratives, based on conflicting truth-claims can and often do lead to violence.

Yet, as I have tried to show in this paper, the notion of truth is also central in nonviolence. However in the context of nonviolence truth is understood in a very specific way, which I have denoted here with the Sanskrit term satya, taken from the work of Mohandas Gandhi. The role of satya in the work of Gandhi has often been discussed, but mostly as a very context-specific and culturally defined notion. But, as I have tried to point out in this article this element of satya can also be found in the work of other groups and individuals that engage with nonviolence, although they might not use that specific term and that it is in fact a central element. These different practices in different contexts expand and amend our understanding of the role of satya in nonviolence. The work of Václav Havel provides a clear example of the specific use of truth in nonviolence, from a western context.

Gandhi has pointed out how satya is rooted in an understanding of reality as plural.

Although he does not use the term, Havel's work shows that satya demands that we see the world as an arena where different truths meet and interact, something that he denotes with the logic of stories. Satya, then, does not point to a monolithic conception of truth. Gandhi has pointed

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out how satya is rooted in an understanding of reality as plural (*anekanta-vada*). It is therefore impossible for one individual or group to (claim to) represent the complete truth.

Following Patočka, Havel's living in truth shows how the search for our own truth and living in accordance with it is a way of preserving our own humanity, and also a way of helping others find theirs. Patočka, Havel, and Gandhi all show that the enforcement of one truth over another amounts to a form of violence and dehumanization, in Havel's term the destruction of the story. But they also provide us with ways to prevent and resist such violence, and aim for re-humanization.

Satya represents the constant striving to come to a fuller, more complex picture of truth, based in lived experience. Conflicting visions of truth each represent facets of (human) reality. This leads to the connection with *ahimsa*, or acting with the intention not to harm. The confrontation with other truth claims and perspectives on good living provides us with the opportunity to develop new and more complex conceptions and visions of reality, of different strategies of being in the world, of new forms of good living, both personal and social. Havel's work also shows that this is not an easy road to travel and that there are plenty of reasons not to embark on it; the costs can be great. Patočka's death as a result of speaking out through the Charter 77 has on a number of occasions been compared to the death of Socrates[68] and although Havel's life eventually took a different turn, his living in truth led him to imprisonment, censorship, and harassment. Choosing survival within the system is an understandable choice. However, in the context of nonviolence, it is precisely through giving up this understandable option that a new form of power is gained. The work of both Gandhi and Havel shows us something of how this mechanism works. In a globalizing world in which people are in an ever increasing manner confronted with conflicting global narratives on good living, the insights of Gandhi and Havel are crucial.

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Notes

1. "Stories and Totalitarianism," trans. Paul Wilson, *Index on Censorship* 3 (March 1988).

2. Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2003); Marshall B. Rosenberg, *Speak Peace: What You Say Next Will Change Your World,* 1st ed (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2005).

3. Michael N. Nagler, *The Search for a Nonviolent Future: A Promise of Peace for Ourselves, Our Families, and Our World* (Novato, Calif.: New World Library, 2004).

4. The word *satyagraha* was coined by Gandhi to denote his method for socio-political change. It consists of *satya*, truth, and *agraha*, to hold on to, or to firmly grasp. Literally it means "to firmly hold on to truth," but it is mostly translated as truth-force.

5. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *An Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments With Truth,* trans. Mahadev Desai (Ahmdabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927).

6. Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (London, U.K.; Totowa, N.J.: Zed Books for the United Nations University, 1986).

7. Akeel Bilgrami, "Gandhi's Religion and Its Relation to His Politics," in *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi,* ed. Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 93–116.

8. Manfred B. Steger, "Searching for Satya through Ahimsa: Gandhi's Challenge to Western Discourses of Power," *Constellations* 13, no. 3 (2006): 342.

9. The parable of the Blind Men and the Elephant is an ancient story originating in the Indian subcontinent. It is part of the traditional knowledge of Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and some forms of Sufism. Though there exist different versions, the essence of the story is always the same: seven blind men gather around an elephant to study it and find out what an elephant actually is. They stand around the animal and each examine by touch the part of the elephant in front of them. Of course, each touches a different part and comes to a different conclusion about the reality of the elephant. The outcome is different in the different versions. Sometimes the blind men quarrel, even violently. They wonder how it can be that they differ so much. Sometimes they start to compare their

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findings. In some versions, a sighted man walks by and talks to them about the complete elephant, and so, in the process they also learn that they are blind. The story is used in many different contexts as a metaphor for how to deal with reality, with different viewpoints and with truth-claims.

10. Bilgrami, "Gandhi's Religion," 96.

11. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* 33, ed. Publications Division Government of India, vol. 33 (New Delhi, IN: Publications Division Government of India, 1999), 410.

12. John M. Koller, "Why Is Anekantavada Important?," in *Ahimsa, Anekanta and Jainism* (Delhi etc.: Motilal Banarsidass, 2004), 88.

13. Bilgrami, "Gandhi's Religion."

14. Steger, "Satya through Ahimsa."

15. Michael N. Nagler, *Strategic and Principled Nonviolence: What to Look For* 1, vol. 1, 28 vols., PACS 164A (Berkeley, Calif, 2006).

16. David Cortright, *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

17. Ibid., 215.

18. Steger, "Satya through Ahimsa."

19. Bilgrami, "Gandhi's Religion."

20. Ibid., 118.

21. Vimala Thakar, *Glimpses of Raja Yoga: An Introduction to Patanjali's Yoga Sutras,* Yoga Wisdom Classics (Berkeley, Calif: Rodmell Press, 2005), 20.

22. Joan V. Bondurant, *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 195.

23. Edward F. Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age: Politics and Phenomenology in the Thought of Jan Patočka* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).

24. The Helsinki Declaration on Principles Guiding Relations between Participating States, was the result of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, held in Finland in 1975. Most European countries, including most communist states as well as Canada and the USA signed the declaration. The signing states promised to respect each other's sovereignty, guarantee their citizen's human rights, fundamental freedoms, and self-determination and to work towards international cooperation and the peaceful settlement of disputes. Because the declaration did not have the status of a treaty, it was not legally binding. It did, however, become an important document for various resistance groups, specifically

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in communist states, on the basis of which they claimed the right to resist and speak out openly.

25. Ibid., Václav Havel, "Remembering Jan Patočka," in *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology: Centenary Papers,* ed. Ivan Chvatík and Erika Abrams (Dordrecht; New York: Springer, 2011); Erazim Kohák, *Jan Patocka: Philosophy and Selected Writings* (University of Chicago Press, 1989); Robert Pirro, "Václav Havel and the Political Uses of Tragedy," *Political Theory* 30, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 228–58.

26. Ibid.

27. Havel, "Remembering Jan Patočka," xv.

28. Havel, "Remembering Jan Patočka."

29. Delia Popescu, *Political Action in Václav Havel's Thought: The Responsibility of Resistance* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2012).

30. Ibid.

31. Irena Martínková, "Jan Patočka's Three Movements of Human Life with Respect to Physical Education and Sport Practice," Acta Universitatis Palackianae Olomucensis. *Gymnica* 36, no. 2 (2006).

32. Popescu, *Political Action in Václav Havel's Thought*.

33. Ivan Chvatík and Erika Abrams, eds., *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology: Centenary Papers,* Contributions to Phenomenology 61 (Dordrecht; New York: Springer, 2011); Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age;* Edward F. Findlay, "Classical Ethics and Postmodern Critique: Political Philosophy in Václav Havel and Jan Patočka," *Review of Politics* 61, no. 03 (August 5, 2009): 403; Martínková, "Jan Patočka's Three Movements of Human Life with Respect to Physical Education and Sport Practice."

34. Ibid., 64.

35. Jan Patočka, James Dodd, and Erazim V. Kohák, *Heretical Essays in the Philosophy of History* (Open Court, 1996), 39–40.

36. Martínková, "Jan Patočka's Three Movements of Human Life with Respect to Physical Education and Sport Practice," 64.

37. Patočka as cited in Findlay, *Caring for the Soul in a Postmodern Age,* 54.

38. Foucault gave two series of lectures on *parrhesia* in Paris at the Collège de France in January–March 1983 and in February–March 1984, and one at the University of California, Berkeley in October–November 1983.

39. Michel Foucault, "Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia." (Berkeley, CA, November 1983); Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the*

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Truth (the Government of Self and Others II): Lectures at the Collège de France, 1983-1984 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Michel Foucault, *The Government of Self and Others: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1982-1983,* ed. Frédéric Gros (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

40. Foucault, "Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia.," 5.

41. Foucault, "Discourse and Truth: The Problematization of Parrhesia."; Foucault, *The courage of the truth (the government of self and others II);* Foucault, *The government of self and others.*

42. Chvatík and Abrams, Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology; Martínková, "Jan Patočka's Three Movements of Human Life with Respect to Physical Education and Sport Practice"; Pirro, "Václav Havel and the Political Uses of Tragedy."

43. See also: Steger, "Satya through Ahimsa."

44. Popescu, *Political Action in Václav Havel's Thought,* 10.

45. Pirro, "Václav Havel and the Political Uses of Tragedy."

46. D. Christopher Brooks, "The Art of the Political: Havel's Dramatic Literature as Political Theory," *East European Quarterly* 39, no. 4 (December 22, 2005): 491.

47. Pirro, "Václav Havel and the Political Uses of Tragedy"; Aviezer Tucker, *Philosophy and Politics of Czech Dissidence from Patočka to Havel* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2000).

48. Pirro, "Václav Havel and the Political Uses of Tragedy," 231.

49. Václav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-eastern Europe,* ed. John Keane (London; New York: Routledge, 2009).

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51. Ibid., 21.

52. Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens Against the State in Central-eastern Europe.*

53. Havel, "Stories and Totalitarianism," 3.

54. Havel as cited in Brooks, "The Art of the Political," 495.

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56. Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People,* 1st ed (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003), 202.

57. Michael Bamberg, "Considering Counter Narratives," in *Considering Counter Narratives: Narrating, Resisting, Making Sense,* ed. Michael Bamberg

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and Molly Andrews (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004), 351–71.

58. Pirro, "Václav Havel and the Political Uses of Tragedy," 233.

59. Ramin Jahanbegloo, *The Gandhian Moment,* 2013, 88.

60. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Constructive Programme: Its Meaning and Place*. (Ahmedabad, India: Navajivan Publishing House, 1927), 4.

61. Joanne Sheehan, "Gandhi's Constructive Program—and Ours," *Peacework* 2006, no. 368 (2006): 1–10.

62. Robert J Burrowes, *The Strategy of Nonviolent Defense a Gandhian Approach* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 216.

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64. Carlton K. Larsen, "The Revival of Public Man : Vaclav Havel and the Transformation of Czechoslovakia," *Journal of Developing Societies* 10, no. 2 (July 1, 1994): 161–72.

65. Ibid.

66. Sheehan, "Gandhi's Constructive Program—and Ours," 5.

67. Pirro, "Václav Havel and the Political Uses of Tragedy," 253.

68. Chvatík and Abrams, *Jan Patočka and the Heritage of Phenomenology.*

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CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

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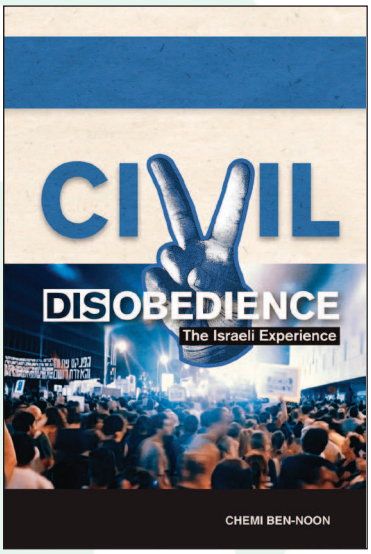

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